

Punabbhava or Punaruppatti? Is there a Question here?

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We are surprised to find Buddhists, both monks and laymen, spending quite a lot of their time and energy trying to settle the meaning of the two words *punabbhava* and *punaruppatti* presented above. We undertake a clarification of these two very vital Buddhist concepts here at a time when there is in the country today what we would call a dangerously misguided movement by one or two enthusiastic persons to tear off Buddhism in the country, both in its theory and practice, from the Pali language and render it into Sinhala as the language of the land.

We would be much happier than we are now if our Sinhala Buddhists knew and know what the Pali words mean when they make adorations of the Buddha, Dhamma and the Sangha and make offerings unto them. Or when the monks make chantings of *paritta*, invoking blessings upon them. If both parties, both monks and laymen, make an honest endeavour, it should not take them years to master the meaning of what they say. Knowing of the many translation errors we discover every day in Sinhala versions of Buddhist texts, it would be calamitous and disastrous, if we completely do away with the Pali originals.

Towards achieving this intimacy and familiarity in Sinhala regarding the Pali originals relating to the Dhamma for the purpose of increasing and enhancing the quality of *saddhā* in our Buddhists, we should definitely strive, but in a greater spirit of friendship and cooperation and not of hostility and distrust. Pali texts should get rendered into many languages, with greater clarity and precision, and move into the midst of as many ethnic groups as possible. Therein lies the benefit of the impact of Buddhism.

The two basic concepts we are handling here are *bhava* and *uppatti*. These

two are prefixed with the word *puna* which in Pali means **again** or **repeatedly**. *Bhava* in Pali in our Buddhist context means "a being's continuance in *samsāra* through death and birth, over and over again." According to our Buddhist texts, this is what one legitimately inherits as a result of his or her clinging [or *upādāna*] to the phenomenon of existence. Pali puts it as *upādāna-paccayā bhavo*. Do not just translate the word *bhava* as 'becoming'. Take it in the context of the Paṭiccasamuppāda where it occurs as *upādāna-paccayā bhavo* and *bhava-paccayā jāti*.

While *bhava* means a being's continuance in *samsāra* through death and birth, over and over again, until he terminates it in Nirvāna, *jāti* means each manifestation of that being in a new life form: *yā tesam tesam sattānam tamhi tamhi sattanikāye jāti sañjāti okkanti nibbatti abhinibbatti khandhānaṃ pātubhāvo āyatanānaṃ paṭilābho. Ayam vuccati āvuso jāti*. [Saccavibhaṅga Sutta. M.III.249]. We also notice that this concept of *jāti* is invariably linked up with the concept of *uppatti* [from the verbal concept of *uppajjati* which means 'is born']. Death is described as being invariably followed by birth: *miyati ca cavati ca uppajjati ca*.

Thus it becomes abundantly clear that in all cases of Buddhist thinking in terms of continuance in the painful process of existence called *samsāra*, the term *bhava* denotes the total inheritance of being in *samsāra*. It is the larger unit and is vast and expansive. Being caught within it, no matter in what sort of relatively blissful state, is described as being an utterly stupid position. This is said to be what people do when they do not know the true doctrine of the Buddha.

Here is Theri Sumedhā waxing eloquent as one who knows the Dhamma and knows what she is talking about. She is very severe and stern in her chastisement when she is critical of people's aspiration to born in the heavenly worlds. Enjoy it in her own words.

*Saccāni amma buddhavaradesitāni te bahutarā ajānantā
ye abhinandanti bhavagataṃ pihanti devesu upapattiṃ.*

*Devesu 'pi upapatti asassatā bhavagate aniccamhi
na ca santasanti bālā punappunam jāyitabbassa.* Therīgāthā vv.454-5

Many, O mother, not understanding the teachings of the Noble Buddha, rejoice continuing in *Samsāra*. They aspire for birth in the heavenly worlds. Birth even in the heavenly worlds is impermanent, for it is still within the ever-changing *samsāra*. The foolish dread not at being born again again.

[Translated by the author].

In the above verses we also note that the word *upapatti* is being used freely to denote birth in any state of existence within the *samsāric* frame as in *devesu upapatti*. It is also important to note here that *samsāra* is referred to here as impermanent *bhavagata* [*bhavagate aniccamhi*]. This is why the Buddhists have to awaken to the reality of the situation that 'being in *samsāra* and being subject to the recurrent process of being born again and again is painful: *dukkhā jāti punappunam*.

This is also the reason why an *arahant* gleefully says that the present is his last birth [*ayam antima jāti*] and that he has no more *bhava* left for him [*natthi 'dāni punabbhavo*].

Now please appreciate that both *punabbhava* and *punaruppatti* have to be part of your stock in trade, if you have to transact business as a Buddhist. Both dimensions implied by these two terms are equally indispensable. You must soon acquire the conceptual magnitude of your Buddhist thinking. You cannot afford to over-simplify your religion, neither because of absolute poverty in your knowledge of the Dhamma nor because you think, without much basis, that you are an expert in the field.

